1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

CHAPTER IV

AGE GRADING

The male's life cycle is divided on the basis of definite social groupings ordinarily spoken of as age grades. Although these social changes which take place in a man's life are at more or less definite physical age levels for all of the men, purely social factors have an equal importance in determining a man's status within the age grades.

Age grading is a generalizing process that cuts across the whole group, and is generically connected with the immediate families of procreation and orientation. Status in the age grades is closely correlated with a man's family position.

The peoples of the different areas apply various terms to each of the age grades. The ones used here are those which seem to be in more general use by all the Murngin. Children up until the age of six or eight are called dji-mer-ku-li regardless of sex; but as soon as he is circumcised a boy may be called by a term that denotes the ceremony which was used for his circumcision. The boy who is circumcised by the Djungguan is called par-tung-o, the name of the ground where the bushes are put in the outside camp and where his blood falls. Sometimes the names mo-lu-lu and mor-da are used for the Djungguan initiates.—This circumcision name is used from the time a boy is cut until he is dead, but is looked upon as an age-grading term to separate a male from the uncircumcised group below him. Sometimes an uncut boy is called da-pi gar-da-ko or yo-to gar-da-ko (foreskin) from his birth until he is painted for his initiation.

Wangurri married men who belong to the age grade above the younger single men are called mir-ri ma-mi, "camp." The Djambarpingu people call an as yet childless married man wonga mirri, "camp-man," which distinguishes him as a man who still has an attenuated relation with his family of orientation and has not yet established his family of procreation, who has been initiated into the various ceremonials that represent the attainment of a mature age-grade status, and who is in the main married people's camp and not

1:Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

561 in the boys'.—During his entire life a man has age-segregating terms
885 applied to him.
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A small girl is called mielk yoto (woman child, or small child).
561 A girl with breasts and without a child is referred to as wirkul mielk (breasts woman). From first pregnancy until death a woman is called gung-mun, literally, giver.

Very old men are more or less informally given an age-grade status and grouped under the term or-ung-o, and old women are called kar-kar-ang (white hair).

The tests of a man's ordinary status are (1) his responsibility in blood feuds and (2) the possession of children. The tests of a man's ritual status are (1) the areas of the sacred grounds into which he can penetrate and (2) the parts of the graded rituals in which he can participate. Although these two categories of status do not always coincide, they usually do, for it is felt that they should. Further, the effect of the ritual taboos of the different grades decidedly alters a man's ordinary participation in the community's daily round of events.

857 Small children, boys and girls, accompany their mothers to the lily
852 swamps or oyster beds. They are carried astride their mothers' necks and put their hands around the mother's forehead. (This method is used in the initiation rituals when the little boys are carried by the men, to indicate the age status of the neophytes.)

857 Little girls continue to accompany their mothers and help them at
868 first as a part of their play. Gradually they learn their part in the
482 woman's division of labor. The division between men and women is concretely expressed by the manner in which they carry their personal baskets. The women place the string handle of the basket over their foreheads and allow the basket to hang down their backs. The men place the string handle over their arms and wear the basket hanging from their shoulders.

857 In due time the small boys form little groups and play by themselves such games as throwing mud balls at one another, throwing slender sticks in the manner of their fathers, and they indulge in many kinds of improvised and not very formalized play.

Young boys, before and after circumcision, carry small fish spears with them, but do not use spear-throwers. They play along the water's edge with the spears, and occasionally strike a small fish, developing their throwing technique to considerable accuracy. At this period they

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

561 591 camp there is a definite recognition of age. They are seen no longer as babies but as growing boys; but if the young men stay in the men's camp after they grow a beard it is then not so much a matter of age grading as such as it is a single status that is being recognized, since they are now at the proper age for marriage. It is marriage which takes males out of the men's camp and puts them in the general camp. The young men's camp recognizes sex, marriage status, and age. A large 561 591 number of men who are past the adolescence ceremonies, that is, the totem-seeing rituals, continue in the young men's camp because they 885 have yet to obtain a wife. Further proof that marriage is a final 484 criterion of status is found in the fact that men who travel without their women stay in the men's camp, since at that moment they are single men and not to be classed as married. The only deviation from this of which the writer knows is that occasionally a man will stay in a brother's camp if visiting outside his own clan's territory.

561 867 869 887 In the young men's camp the oldest man takes charge and reprimands all wrongdoers with the assistance of the near relatives of the offending youths. He also gives them instructions and advice about the totemic emblems when they have seen them, and informs them on the tribal mores, tradition, and mythology. At times there may be more than one old man in the men's camp. The division of authority and power is then based on the personalities of the old men, the more dominant achieving a greater control over the boys. Such authority is more explicit here than one finds it in almost any other part of the Murngin behavior, with the possible exception of the ceremonial ritual when the leader decides when and where it shall be held.

224 His near female relatives carry the bones of the animal when a boy makes his first kill. It is supposed to be done for all the animals a male kills until he has a baby. The bones of the animal or bird are painted with red ocher. If a boy kills a turkey or other large bird, he does not pick it up but leaves it, returns to the camp and tells some old man. He does not say the name of the turkey but calls out "Ka-ok," the sound the turkey makes, to tell his listener what has happened so that he can pick it up. If a young man finds a porcupine (echidna), he will not kill it but goes to tell an old man of his find. [262] If it is killed, he cannot eat it. After they have been carried by the women, the bones of the larger animals are put in a basket made by the mother for this purpose. The basket is placed near the camp and no one touches it, for it would anger the relatives of the boy and a fight would follow.

Significance of the Djanggawul

issues. The concept that woman is profane, in comparison with man the sacred, is not a feature of eastern Arnhem Land religious or lay thought.

The symbolism in the myth and songs makes clear the intentions of the relevant ritual. In the *dua* moiety *nara*, as an expression of the Djanggawul ideology, the major incidents of the myth are re-enacted in symbolic form. Much of this ritual is taken up with totemic dancing; and the animals, birds, reptiles and vegetable matter danced are totemic in so far that they relate directly or indirectly to the dominant theme. Further, these totems are not used only in relation to the Djanggawul, but are part of the spiritual heritage of the *dua* moiety linguistic groups and clans, which in turn are associated with the Djanggawul.

Dua nara rituals are all inspired by the Djanggawul, although at times irrelevant elements enter; for example, other *dua* spirits or Ancestral Beings of minor importance become associated with the main theme, or *jiritja* moiety elements appear from time to time in the myth. But the Djanggawul are *dua*, and their ceremonies are solely of the *dua nara*, and not (as Warner mentions)[1] of both *dua* and *jiritja*. The latter are inspired by their own separate ideology, and by the Laintjung and Banaitja Ancestral Beings; and although similar in many points, they are basically different. However, it is the practice for some *jiritja* men (maternally related to the *dua* moiety) to help out *dua* postulants, or vice versa: and it is usual for both moieties to hold their own particular rituals at approximately the same time. At Yirrkalla, separate ceremonial grounds and separate huts are used by each moiety; but in the western Arnhem Land variant of the *nara* rituals the same ground is used, although each moiety has its separate hut (or shade), which may or may not adjoin that of the other. In eastern Arnhem Land, the ritual demarcation between the moieties is particularly noticeable.

The *dua*, and for that matter the *jiritja*, *nara* are the most important religious ceremonies of eastern Arnhem Land. Being far more important that the *kunapipi*, *ngurlmag* and *djunggawon*, they are not concerned with age-grading in the same sense that other initiation rituals are. They are primarily revelatory in character; and although novices are received, they are rather neophytes who are already fully initiated into manhood, and already possessed of a certain amount of religious knowledge. By the time a man sees his first *nara* he is well past adolescence, and usually married; he would normally be expected to have already seen the *ngurlmag*; and to be taking a major part in *djunggawon* dancing, as well as in that of the *kunapipi*, although the latter is optional.

[1] *op. cit.*, p. 340.